NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
POLITICAL FEATURE NO. 1-0213 FEBRUARY 20, 1976
ANITA CHAPMAN

LESTER BROWN ON WORLD FOOD OUTLOOK
("PRESS CONFERENCE -- USA")

ANNCR:

SOME TIME AGO, A PROVOCATIVE EXPERT ON FOOD, POPULATION AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ORGANIZED IN WASHINGTON THE WORLD WATCH INSTITUTE TO PUBLICIZE EMERGING SOCIAL TRENDS AND PROBLEMS. HIS NAME IS LESTER BROWN, AND THIS WEEK HE CAME TO SHARE WITH THE VOICE OF AMERICA AUDIENCE SOME OF HIS THOUGHTS ON A WORLD PROBLEM: FOOD. HERE WITH MORE ON HIS VIEWS IS VOA'S ANITA CHAPMAN:

VOICE:

LESTER BROWN IS CALLED BY SOME A PROPHET OF DOOM WHO PREDICTS A CHRONIC SHORTAGE OF FOOD AND RISING MALNUTRITION IN THE WORLD'S POPULATION. SOME QUESTION HIS STATISTICS. BUT HE IS INTERESTED LESS IN STATISTICS THAN IN TRENDS, AND HOW THE COMING GENERATION WILL BE AFFECTED IF THE CURRENT DECLINE IN FOOD SUPPLIES IS NOT HALTED:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- BROWN

"WHETHER IT'S FOUR HUNDRED MILLION OR A BILLION (THOUSAND MILLION) IS PROBABLY NOT TERRIBLY IMPORTANT. IT'S A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO'RE AFFECTED. AND IMPORTANTLY, IT'S YOUNGSTERS WHO ARE BEING AFFECTED EVERYWHERE, BECAUSE THEY DON'T GET ENOUGH PROTEIN. THIS IS IMPORTANT NOT ONLY IN TERMS OF HEALTH BUT IN TERMS OF LONG-TERM PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DEVELOPMENT.

VOICE:

IT'S IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS THAT THE WORLD FOOD PICTURE HAS SEEMED TO CRYSTALIZE INTO A PATTERN OF SHORTAGE. MISTER BROWN POINTS OUT THAT FROM NINETEEN SIXTY TO SEVENTY-TWO THERE WAS A GRADUAL EXPANSION OF FOOD PRODUCTION. BUT STARTING IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES, THE HIGH

COST OF OIL AND PETROLEUM-DERIVED FERTILIZERS REVERSED THE TREND. AND THE LOSS HAS NOT BEEN MADE UP, EVEN THOUGH THE UNITED STATES HAS PUT BACK INTO PRODUCTION SOME OF ITS IDLE FARMLANDS.

MISTER BROWN SEES THE GROWTH IN FOOD SUPPLY DURING THE SIXTIES AS THE RESULT OF WHAT IS TERMED THE "GREEN REVOLUTION," WHICH REQUIRED THE MASSIVE APPLICATION OF HIGH-GRADE FERTILIZERS. SOME SPECTACULAR RESULTS WERE ACHIEVED, INDIA, FOR INSTANCE, DOUBLING ITS WHEAT CROP IN ONLY SIX YEARS. BUT THE FLAMBOYANT SUCCESS OF THE GREEN REVOLUTION LULLED MANY GOVERNMENTS INTO IGNORING STEADILY RISING POPULATIONS OR THINKING HARVESTS WOULD INDEFINITELY GET BIGGER. SUCH WAS NOT THE CASE, AND THE NEW TREND BEGAN, OF POPULATIONS GROWING FASTER THAN FOOD SUPPLIES.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO BALANCE THE TWO? MISTER BROWN THINKS GOVERNMENTS WILL EVENTUALLY ADOPT THE GOAL OF ZERO POPULATION GROWTH. SOME GOVERNMENTS HAVE ALREADY SET THIS GOAL, BUT RESULTS HAVE BEEN UNEVEN:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- BROWN

THERE ARE NOW A HALF DOZEN INDUSTRIAL COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE ESSENTIALLY STABILIZED THEIR POPULATIONS, THAT IS, BIRTHS AND DEATHS ARE IN BALANCE. BOTH EAST AND WEST GERMANY WOULD BE IN THIS CATEGORY, FOR INSTANCE. IN THE LOW INCOME COUNTRIES THERE'S BEEN GREAT PROGRESS IN A HANDFUL OF COUNTRIES, MOST IMPORTANTLY, IN CHINA. IN ANOTHER LARGE COUNTRY, INDIA, THERE'S BEEN SOME PROGRESS IN REDUCING BIRTH RATES, BUT NOT NEARLY ENOUGH."

VOICE:

WHY ARE RESULTS SO VARIED? MISTER BROWN GIVES NATIONAL COMMITMENT AS THE ANSWER. ANY MAJOR EFFORT,

HE SAYS, IS SUCCESSFUL WHERE THERE'S COMMITMENT AT THE TOP.

THE WORLD AT PRESENT, MISTER BROWN POINTS OUT, IS DISQUIETINGLY DEPENDENT ON NORTH AMERICA FOR ITS SUPPLY OF GRAIN. THIS IS TRUE EVEN WHERE COUNTRIES HAVE VAST RESOURCES OF MONEY AVAILABLE AND WANT TO MODERNIZE THEIR AGRICULTURE:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- BROWN

"I THINK THE THING THAT'S BEING OVERLOOKED IS THAT IT TAKES MORE THAN CAPITAL TO EXPAND FOOD PRODUCTION. IT TAKES INSTITUTIONS, IT TAKES CREDIT SERVICES, IT TAKES TECHNICAL ADVISORY SERVICES, IT TAKES MARKETING SYSTEMS, IT TAKES FARM TO MARKET ROADS, AND IT TAKES MANAGEMENT KNOW-HOW ON THE FARM...UNFORTUNATELY, MANY OF THE COUNTRIES THAT HAVE A LOT OF MONEY FROM OIL ARE NOT COUNTRIES THAT HAVE WELL DEVELOPED HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES IN THE RURAL AREA."

VOICE:

THIS INDICATES, IN MISTER BROWN'S VIEW, HOW LIMITED NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS CAN BE IN COPING WITH THIS ESSENTIALLY GLOBAL PROBLEM. THE CAPITAL, RESOURCES, AND COMMITMENT MUST COME FROM THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS. BUT THE TECHNOLOGY, ADVICE, AND FOOD RESERVES MUST BE ORGNIZED ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL. THE ROME FOOD CONFERENCE CALLED FOR AN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT FUND. THIS HAS RECENTLY BEEN CREATED UNDER THE WORLD BANK. IT CALLED FOR THE STOCKPILING OF FOOD RESERVES. BUT THIS CALL HAS AS YET GONE ALMOST UNHEARD. MISTER BROWN DOES NOT SEE A SOLUTION UNLESS THERE IS GLOBAL COMMITMENT ALSO:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- BROWN

"IT SEEMS TO ME WE HAVE TO BEGIN THINKING OF THE FOOD PROBLEM IN GLOBAL TERMS, BECAUSE IT IS A GLOBAL PROBLEM. IF THERE'RE FOOD SHORTAGES IN THE SOVIET UNION OR IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT OR WHEREVER, IT AFFECTS THE ENTIRE WORLD PRICE AND STRUCTURE FOR FOOD."

VOICE:

LESTER BROWN, HEAD OF THE WORLD WATCH INSTITUTE,

DURING A RECENT INTERVIEW WITH THE VOICE OF AMERICA.

-0-

JS/CAM